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REMARKS

The amendments and remarks presented herein are believed to be fully responsive to the recent Office Action. Enclosed herewith is a petition and fee for a three-month extension of time in order to extend the response due date to April 11, 2006. Reconsideration is requested.

Drawings.

Upon review of the application, it was discovered that the drawings do not completely correspond to the specification. In particular, paragraph [0017] specifies that uncleared conveyor line 44 passes the bag to a manual inspection station 46. The drawing shows manual inspection station 46 in the cleared bag conveyor 38 rather than in the uncleared conveyor line 44. It would be apparent to the skilled artisan that the specification is correct and the drawing requires correction. Accordingly, drawing figure 1 is corrected. Enclosed is a replacement sheet, as well as an annotated sheet showing changes. No new matter is added. Also, enclosed are formal drawings labeled as replacement sheets. Acceptance of the drawings is earnestly requested.

Disposition of Claims.

Claims 1-35 were pending in the application. Claims 7-10, 15-17 and 30-33 are cancelled. Accordingly, claims 1-6, 11-14, 18-29, 33 and 34 remain pending in the application.

Claim Objections.

Claims 1-35 were objected to for having improper form. The claims are properly formatted in the present response. Accordingly, withdrawal of the objection is requested.

Claim Rejection – 35 U.S.C. § 102 and 35 U.S.C. § 103(a).

Claims 1, 2, 5-9, 12, 13, 22-25, 28-32 and 35 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102 as being anticipated by published U.K. Patent Application GB 2,242,520 A by Fowler et al. ("Fowler"). Claims 3, 4, 11, 14-21, 26, 27 and 34 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Fowler. Claims 10 and 33 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Fowler in view of United States Patent 5,588,520 issued to Affaticati.

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et al. ("Affaticati"). Because the prior art fails to disclose, teach or suggest every element arranged in the same manner as in the rejected claims, the rejection is traversed. In order to expedite prosecution, claim 1 is amended as follows:

1. A baggage screening system, comprising:
a plurality of screening subsystems, each comprising an automated ~~baggage~~ bag screen device and a feed conveyor for feeding bags to said screen device; and
a supply conveyor for supplying bags to said screening subsystems, said supply conveyor supplying bags only to a screening subsystem that has no more than a particular number of unscreened bags that are at that screening subsystem;
a cleared bag conveyor and an uncleared bag conveyor;
and
a sortation conveyor network downstream of said screening subsystem to selectively divert bags to said cleared bag conveyor or said uncleared bag conveyor;
wherein said sortation conveyor network comprises a buffer downstream of each said bag screen device and a pair of diverters associated with each said buffer, said buffer buffering bags for a secondary bag screening function, one of said diverters upstream of the associated said buffer being adapted to divert a bag to either said cleared bag conveyor or said buffer, another of said diverters downstream of the associated said buffer being adapted to divert a bag to either said cleared bag conveyor or said uncleared bag conveyor, wherein bags cleared by either said bag screen device or said secondary screening function can be diverted to said cleared bag conveyor.

Claims 14 and 22, which are the remaining independent claims in the application, were amended in a similar manner.

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It is submitted that, even if the interpretation set forth in the Office Action is adopted, neither Fowler alone, nor the combination of Fowler and Affaticati, discloses, teaches or suggests the invention as defined in claims 1, 14 and 22 including the ability for bags cleared by either the bag screen device or the secondary screening function to be diverted to the cleared bag conveyor. In particular, the references do not disclose, teach or suggest a buffer downstream of each bag screen device and a pair of diverters associated with each buffer, with the buffer buffering bags for a secondary screening function and one of the diverters upstream of the associated buffer being adapted to divert a bag to either a cleared bag conveyor or the buffer and another of the diverters downstream of the associated buffer being adapted to divert a bag to either the cleared bag conveyor or the uncleared bag conveyor.

The Office Action takes the position that it would have been obvious to a person of ordinary skill in the art to modify the apparatus of Fowler to include a buffer as taught by Affaticati so that items could be temporarily halted at a point as a sign for packages needing additional screening. However, in Affaticati, buffer belt 62d is a portion of an induct to a cross-belt sorter. Buffer belt 62d retains parcels until a synchronization belt 62c discharges its article. (See column 5, lines 22-52.) It is submitted that there is no motivation in the art to combine these disparate teachings. Even if Fowler is amended according to Affaticati, there is no teaching of a buffer belt for buffering bags for a secondary bag screening function. Moreover, it is submitted that even if the combination is made, there are important elements missing from the combination. For example, the combination would not include a pair of diverters associated with each buffer arranged and functioning in the manner recited in the claims.

Further, any attempt to modify Fowler by Affaticati would render Fowler inoperable. In particular, in applying Fowler to the claims, the Office Action equates conveyor 8 to the secondary screening function. In Fowler, conveyor 8 delivers bags which fail inspection to "a designated location where they can be examined more closely." Even if the skilled artisan were to add the Affaticati buffer to secondary screening function 8 of Fowler, there would be no way to provide such Affaticati buffer to Fowler with respect to each bag screen device because all of the bags that fail inspection, irrespective of the inspection channel, get mixed onto conveyor 8. Moreover, there would be no mechanism to divert a bag that is cleared by the secondary screening function for a particular inspection channel to the conveyor 6 of bags that passed inspection. Accordingly, it is submitted that there is no motivation to combine

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the references and, even if combined, not all claim elements are met. Accordingly, the rejection of claims 1, 14 and 22 has been overcome.

Dependent claims 11, 14 and 34 further specify that the secondary bag screening function uses images of bags captured by the screen device. Even if the skilled artisan were to somehow modify Fowler by adding the Affaticati buffer, there would be no ability to utilize the images of bags captured by the respective inspection channel because all of the bags from each inspection channel that fail inspection are combined on a single conveyor 8. Therefore, there would be no way to associate an image captured by the bag screen device with a particular bag at secondary bag screening. Therefore, the primary reference would need to be made even further inoperable to meet the further elements added by dependent claims 11, 18 and 34.

It is submitted that the combined teaching of the references fails to disclose every element of the rejected claims. For that reason alone, the rejection has been overcome. Further, the modification of the primary reference, Fowler, would render that reference inoperable. Accordingly, the rejection has been overcome. Withdrawal is respectfully requested.

The amendments presented herein are fully supported by the application as originally filed. Accordingly, no new matter is added. Issuance of a Notice of Allowance is earnestly solicited. If Examiner Matthews has any questions or reservations, it is requested that Examiner Matthews call the undersigned attorney.

Respectfully submitted,

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Enclosure

Appl. No. 10/710,442
Response Dated Apr. 11, 2006
Reply to Office Action Mailed Oct. 11, 2005
Annotated Sheet Showing Changes

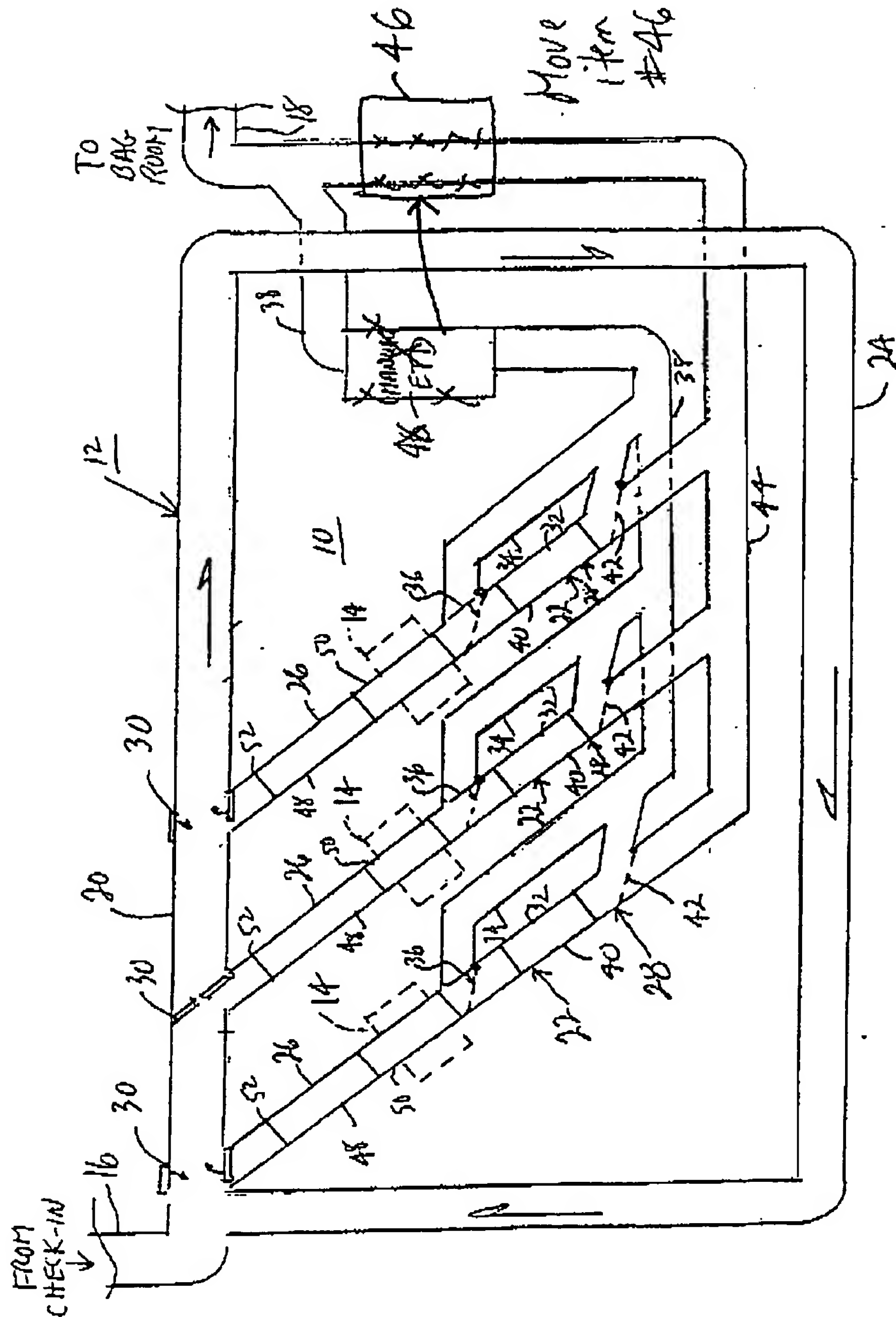


Fig 1